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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Executive Order 13392

Review of Department FOIA Operations and Plan for Improvement

A. Nature of Department FOIA Operations

Although it is among the smallest of the Cabinet-level agencies, the Department of State (the “Department”) literally spans the globe in order to accomplish its foreign policy, security, consular, and related responsibilities. The Department’s physical facilities consist of over 250 embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions in virtually every country in the world, numerous offices in and around the Washington, D.C. area, and a number of field offices throughout the United States. These worldwide offices do not operate as semi-independent “sub-agencies” within the Department – they collaborate extensively with each other in order to fulfill the Department’s mission. This is why FOIA requests (even if limited to a single topic) regularly necessitate searches in multiple locations within the Department’s hundreds of domestic and overseas facilities.

The Department operates its FOIA program through the Office of Information Programs and Services (“IPS”), which is part of the Bureau of Administration. The Assistant Secretary for Administration serves as the Department’s Chief FOIA Officer.

Maintaining a centralized FOIA program for an agency as large, complex and globally situated as the Department is an enormous challenge. However, the centralized nature of the Department’s FOIA program provides for better service for requesters, affords consistency in review, and allows for better control over the Department’s information access programs.

IPS administers virtually all significant records-access functions within the Department, including the FOIA and the Privacy Act. To carry out this broad responsibility, IPS establishes Departmental policies and procedures with regard to information access, and publishes regulations governing public access to Department records. IPS responds to, or coordinates the responses to, requests for information and records from a wide variety of customers, including the public (through FOIA and other information access provisions), the courts, the Congress, other federal agencies, private litigants, foreign governments and Department of State personnel. In addition to administering

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the Department's FOIA program, IPS is also responsible for ensuring that the Department is in compliance with the Federal Records Act, the Privacy Act, and E.O. 12958, as amended (Classified National Security Information), including the declassification review of all Department records reaching 25 years of age. Although these activities interrelate with FOIA, they also compete with FOIA for resources.

The divisions and staffs of IPS are comprised of program analysts who are responsible for records management, case processing, research, and policy development and implementation; retired Foreign Service Officers who serve as expert consultants and reviewers; technical information specialists who retrieve, index, prepare and scan archival documents; computer specialists who design, develop, maintain and operate the corporate electronic archive, case tracking system and Intranet and Internet websites; and a variety of support staff.

The Department currently accepts FOIA requests by mail, facsimile, or via the Department's FOIA website. Incoming FOIA requests are reviewed to ensure that they are in compliance with Department FOIA regulations (22 CFR 171). When requests do not comply with Department FOIA regulations, IPS notifies requesters what is needed to "perfect" them.

Each perfected FOIA request is assigned to an IPS case analyst. The case analyst determines which offices within the Department may have responsive records and sends a copy of the FOIA request to those offices. Most offices are instructed to return potentially relevant documents to IPS for review.

The IPS case analyst also determines whether the FOIA request requires a search of any of the Department's "centralized" records (retired records and centralized electronic records). In response to FOIA and other types of requests, IPS conducts searches of the Department's vast numbers of inactive retired records. These records are stored in off-site facilities. In addition, IPS maintains and conducts searches of the Department's corporate electronic archive – the State Archiving System, which contains substantive documents that establish, discuss, or define foreign policy, set precedents, or require action or use by more than one office. It includes official record copies of incoming and outgoing Departmental communications, including telegrams between the Department and overseas posts; diplomatic notes; correspondence to and from the White House, members of Congress and other Federal agencies; position papers and reports; memoranda of conversation; and inter-office memoranda. It is a comprehensive source of information that documents and records the

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conduct of U.S. foreign policy, and currently contains over 28 million records dating from 1973 to present.

A handful of offices within the Department conduct their own review of certain responsive documents and correspond directly with FOIA requesters. These offices deal with unique records (for example, personnel, security, medical and consular records) that require specialized expertise in order to conduct proper FOIA analysis. Although these so-called “decentralized” offices follow Department FOIA policies and regulations, they manage their own FOIA resources, structure and processing procedures.

With the exception of the decentralized records described above, IPS reviews all records for disclosure under the FOIA and the Privacy Act and corresponds with FOIA requesters. This review often involves consultation with interested bureaus and offices, overseas posts, other Federal agencies, and foreign governments.

IPS oversees the Department’s FOIA administrative appeals process. An independent panel of three retired Foreign Service Officers (typically at the Ambassadorial level) is convened regularly to consider administrative appeals.

IPS maintains an automated case tracking system to track the handling of requests from beginning to end, to track the dispositions of all documents reviewed, and to compile statistics for the FOIA Annual Report. This database enables the Department to quickly determine if a document has been reviewed previously, which substantially reduces review time for any documents already released. Cases are assigned control numbers, which requesters can cite when inquiring about their requests. This database also provides IPS managers with weekly information to help them monitor the FOIA backlog, including the age of the requests.

IPS also maintains the Department’s FOIA website and Electronic FOIA Reading Room where requesters can learn about Department records systems, find out how to make a FOIA request, including how to file a FOIA request online, find answers to frequently asked questions, and can search collections of records released under FOIA and as part of special document production efforts.

Currently, IPS is responsible for handling responses to status inquiries whether made telephonically, electronically (via email) or by mail. In 1997, IPS created

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a staff to handle all status inquiries and requester complaints; the Advocacy and Oversight Branch is within the customer-focused Requester Liaison Division of IPS. This simplified the decisions to name the Requester Liaison Division as the Department's FOIA Requester Service Center and the Chief of that Division as the Department's FOIA Public Liaison whose functions and duties already matched those set out in the Order.

IPS has a long history of continuously looking for ways to improve upon its business processes and the technologies that support them in order to provide the highest level of service possible to its many customers around the world. Thus, IPS welcomes the opportunity afforded by E.O. 13392 to share its successes and experiences with interested readers.

B. Areas Selected for Review

The Department initiated reviews in all areas of its FOIA operations as outlined in the Order. Because the Department's FOIA administration is primarily centralized, the focus of this review was on the operations and practices of IPS. The decentralized bureaus, described above, were asked to conduct their own internal reviews of their FOIA operations. The final analyses of their reviews have been set as a milestone in the Department's improvement plan.

The reader is asked to keep in mind the magnitude, scope and complexity of the Department's FOIA administration. Its worldwide presence, its membership in the national security community, and diversity and range of its programs (from carrying out U.S. diplomacy abroad to issuing passports to U.S. citizens and visas to foreign visitors), have contributed to the evolution of the Department's FOIA program into a highly sophisticated operation.

In many of the areas identified in E.O. 13392 for review, the Department already had accomplished much, or had begun making improvements. For instance, the Department has used information technology to track requests for twenty-five years. Also, since 1997, the Department has maintained an Electronic Reading Room that contains a wealth of information about FOIA, Department organizations and records systems, and significant document collections released to the public. Also in 1997, IPS created the Requester Liaison Division, which is comprised of two branches: the Advocacy and Oversight Branch and the Requester Communications Branch. The division was designed to both respond to inquiries from the public and other IPS customers about our services and their requests, and to focus on customer

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service and helping the public and other customers obtain what they need in a prompt, courteous manner. Thus, the functions of a FOIA Requester Service Center and FOIA Public Liaison were already being performed by this division.

IPS also performs outreach within the Department to provide FOIA guidance. In 2005, IPS hosted a three-day FOIA/PA training program for all interested Department personnel taught by the Department of Justice's Office of Information and Privacy (OIP). The program offered continuing legal education credits to Department attending legal staff and included a half-day devoted to the requester community that included representatives from the Hill, media, and public interest groups. The program was attended by nearly 250 Department employees. OIP reported it as one of the largest such training programs held to date and urged other agencies to hold similar training events.

The Advocacy and Oversight Branch, in coordination with the Department's Acquisitions Management Office, held a requester forum in December 2005 to provide information on procedural requirements and learn more about the specific issues in dealing with requests for contract information from requesters.

IPS also has taken advantage of other training offered by the Department of Justice and encouraged more than a dozen employees to participate in its three-day training at the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, South Carolina. In addition, IPS employees routinely participate in requester forums hosted by the American Society of Access Professionals, the Office of Management and Budget, and other entities, to keep abreast of requesters concerns and best practices in other agencies.

In establishing the FOIA Requester Service Center, all employees who interact with the public are scheduled to receive Customer Service training at the Department's Foreign Service Institute to further enhance interpersonal skills.

IPS has also launched an initiative to achieve certification under the ISO 9000 quality management standard. This internationally recognized standard requires an organization to:

- 1) Define its objectives;
- 2) Define performance standards to meet those objectives;
- 3) Write procedures to meet the standards and detect deviations;
- 4) Change processes to correct systemic deviation;
- 5) Solicit customer feedback; and

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- 6) Change processes to improve performance based on customer feedback.

The Requester Communications Branch, which is the initial point of receipt for incoming FOIA and Privacy Act requests, is the first IPS component to participate in this initiative. Accordingly, procedures surrounding the initial processing of FOIA and Privacy Act requests have been reviewed and documented to ensure that such determinations are made in a consistent manner and in conformance with the Department's regulations. Participation in the ISO 9000 initiative has already improved the Department's communications at the initial processing stage in FOIA and Privacy Act cases. IPS is planning to fold other IPS components into the ISO 9000 initiative.

The Department undertook a successful, major FOIA/PA backlog reduction effort in 2002-2004. However, significant increases in the number of new requests, increased mandated demands, and other factors have caused the FOIA/PA request backlog to rise again. For this reason, backlog reduction is one of the areas targeted for improvement in the Department's plan.

Specific areas reviewed in IPS:

- ▶ Current methods for receiving and providing prompt and appropriate responses to inquiries from FOIA requesters about the status of their requests (Section 2(c)(vi))
- ▶ Overall FOIA administration, including expenditure of resources on FOIA compliance and the extent to which requests for records have not been responded to within the statutory time limit (backlog) (Section 3(a)(i))
- ▶ Processes and practices by which the Department assists and informs the public regarding the FOIA process (Section 3(a)(ii))
- ▶ Use of information technology in responding to FOIA requests (Section 3(a)(iii)(A))
- ▶ Practices with respect to requests for expedited processing (Section 3(a)(iii)(B))

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- ▶ Department implementation of multi-track processing (Section 3(a)(iii)(C))
- ▶ Department policies and practices relating to the availability of public information through websites and other means, including the use of websites to make available the records described in FOIA subsection (a)(2) (Section 3(a)(iv))
- ▶ Identification of ways to eliminate or reduce its FOIA backlog, consistent with available resources and taking into consideration the volume and complexity of the FOIA requests pending with the Department (Section 3(a)(v))
- ▶ Trouble-shooting existing problems – database integrity and FOIA/PA business processes

C. Results of Review

Methods for Prompt, Appropriate Responses to Requests and Status Inquiries

Prior to the preparation of the FY2005 FOIA Annual Report, IPS had launched an initiative to achieve certification under the ISO 9000 quality management standard. The branch within IPS that serves as the initial point of receipt for incoming FOIA requests was the first IPS component to participate in this initiative. Procedures surrounding the validity of a FOIA request, expedited processing determinations, and the granting or denial of fee waivers were reviewed and documented to ensure that these determinations were being made in a consistent manner and in full conformance with the Department's published regulations. This initiative already has produced documented results in producing more comprehensive communications at the initial processing stage in FOIA and Privacy cases. Certification for these activities is expected to occur in October 2006.

Further review results showed that a recent realignment of staff and cutbacks in WAE ("When Actually Employed") staff had resulted in significant delays in initial responses to requests. In addition, the review under E.O. 13392 led the Department to the conclusion that a better system to track responses to status inquiries was needed to allow supervisors to pinpoint bottlenecks in the process and deal with them quickly.

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Resources Expended on FOIA Compliance and Backlog

The Department has struggled with FOIA backlogs off and on over the years. In 2001, the Government Accountability Office gave the Department extremely low marks in this area. The Department's response was a major, two-year backlog reduction effort known as "Operation Due Diligence" ("ODD Project"). IPS was granted twenty-three new full-time positions and a total of \$12 million (\$8 million to sustain the two-year taskforce and \$4 million the following year to continue FOIA backlog and records declassification). The taskforce consisted of full-time employees diverted from our permanent infrastructure to provide leadership, training, and supervision, and reviewers and contractors (analyst, technical and support personnel) from a company that specializes in FOIA backlog reduction, bringing with it experienced information access professionals to aid in the backlog reduction efforts. The ODD Project ultimately surpassed its original goal of completing 80% of all pending cases by the end of fiscal year 2004 (September 30, 2004). Over the two-year project cycle, more than 11,500 requests were completed. By the end of fiscal year 2004, IPS had reduced the Department's overall FOIA backlog from 6,214 to fewer than 2,000 cases.

The Department also initiated actions to increase the resources allocated to the FOIA program, including additional workforce recruitment efforts to supplement existing staffing resources. First, IPS recruited nearly seventy additional retired Senior Foreign Service Officers to add to its document reviewer corps. Such recruiting is an ongoing effort and all are employed on a temporary, part-time basis.

Beginning in 2002, IPS staffed some of the more time-consuming and labor-intensive support activities inherent in responding to FOIA requests and other document production demands with students recruited from universities in the metropolitan area under the "STARS" (Success-Today and Tomorrow-Through Training and Recruiting Students) program. Twenty-three students are currently working in FOIA or FOIA support activities. In addition, IPS has two Presidential Management Fellows. This, too, is an ongoing effort that will continue to make a major contribution to the FOIA program.

IPS is implementing a "Performance, Efficiency, and Quality (PEaQ) Reporting System." The objectives are to enable IPS managers to: (1) measure individual and organizational productivity, (2) determine where resource shortfalls exist, (3) determine where weakness remains in the business process, (4) forecast

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branch/division productivity, (5) monitor and justify program expenditures, and (6) forecast resource requirements.

Processes/Practices for Assisting and Informing the Public on FOIA Process

IPS maintains the Department's FOIA Electronic Reading Room, which is the primary method for informing the public about the FOIA process within the Department. In 2001, the Government Accountability Office gave the Department exceptionally high marks for using electronic media and the Internet to make FOIA guidance, released documents, and reference material available to the public. However, the review currently undertaken revealed some areas that needed updating, both in terms of technology and information provided. The Department also found that although an internal review of a public website was fruitful, a more meaningful measure of website user-friendliness would require obtaining direct input from the user community.

Use of Information Technology in Responding to FOIA Requests

In 2004, IPS added a new functionality to the Department's FOIA website to allow individuals to file on-line FOIA requests. Although the Department's customers have benefited from this improvement, the impact on the program has been significant increases in the number of FOIA requests the Department receives each year. These increases were not foreseen, and have been a contributing factor in the steady upward climb of the FOIA backlog.

IPS already uses information technology to track all phases of request processing. Its current system operates in a national security environment to afford adequate protection of classified information. Due to the inherent constraints of operating within a classified environment, there are internal technical barriers that prevent the smooth transfer of properly declassified data to the Department's website and meeting requester electronic format preferences. Preliminary inquiries into current technological solutions have not been fruitful.

Practices with Respect to Requests for Expedited Processing

IPS determines whether a request meets established criteria for expeditious processing. IPS already employs a checklist, which the case analysts on the Requester Communications Branch use to make initial expedite determinations. In addition, any decision to grant expeditious processing must be approved by

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the Chief of the Requester Liaison Division in coordination with the Office of the Legal Adviser. The latter provides for consistency in decisions to put certain requests ahead of all others. Some improvements could be made to this function in terms of more detailed written guidelines, training for affected staff, and performance oversight.

Implementation of Multi-track Processing

The Department has implemented multi-track processing. However, IPS has discovered that improvements can be made in the Department's identification, tracking and handling of requests within multiple processing tracks.

Policies/Practices on Availability of Public information and (a)(2) Records

The Department determined that there may be room for improvement in meeting full compliance with the requirements of FOIA's subsection (a)(2), including both material that must be automatically disclosed, such as final opinions and orders made in adjudicating cases and statements of policy and interpretations adopted by the Department and not published in the *Federal Register*, and the posting of frequently requested documents. Although the Department received high marks from GAO in 2001 on its compliance with these requirements, there is a need for updating some of the information already disclosed on the website, and a need for establishing procedures and methods for posting frequently requested FOIA records.

Ways to Eliminate or Reduce Backlog

As mentioned earlier, the Department's FOIA backlog was significantly reduced with a major infusion of resources. The two-year backlog reduction project resulted in a reduced backlog ahead of the project's schedule and surpassing its targeted number of completed cases. The IPS team achieved this success with an investment in people, process, infrastructure and technology.

In more recent years, unforeseen increases in the number of new FOIA requests made directly to the Department, and increases in other records-related mandates, indicate that additions to baseline resources may be needed to maintain the level of pending requests at a reasonable level. However, more detailed metrics and evaluation of current resources and processes are required to establish the amount of increase to baseline resources necessary to minimize and stabilize the FOIA/PA request backlog.

Troubleshooting Existing Problems – Data Integrity and Business Process

During the preparation of the FY2005 FOIA Annual Report, IPS already had identified some important areas for improvement. IPS found that certain data in its automated case tracking system has been entered either inconsistently or improperly. Therefore, data integrity and the associated business processes that feed into them were identified as other areas needing improvement.

A common thread throughout the review of IPS FOIA operations was the need to establish baseline data for business processes, and better methods for monitoring those processes. The scope of some of the problems discovered, together with the desire to set realistic, meaningful goals for improvement, led IPS to determine that in-depth evaluation of each improvement area was critical to sustained improvement. Without concrete, reliable data, IPS can neither accurately pinpoint bottlenecks, nor substantiate requests for the resources needed to ensure the outcomes desired.

IPS also has put into place a Process Improvement Team comprised of program analysts from the Statutory Compliance and Research Division that is responsible for completing the processing of FOIA/PA requests made to the Department. The Team was created to address challenges within the present work environment – an increasing workload coupled with scarce resources – and the need to develop solutions at all levels. The Team strives to reduce or eliminate inconsistencies, discrepancies and disparities in processing.

A separate, and complimentary, effort within IPS is the establishment of a Business Process Committee that seeks to address issues raised in a survey of all IPS employees about the work environment and program needs. The focus of the committee is to create a plan of action for promoting efficiency and standardization in all IPS work processes. Among the issues under discussion are the need for standardization, the role of managers, and the need for broader understanding of request processing and skills development.

In Conclusion

The review of IPS FOIA operations (with reviews of the FOIA operations within decentralized offices to follow later this year), identified many areas where improvements have been made, and others where improvements could be made in order to build on past successes. The magnitude and complexity of the Department's worldwide FOIA program and global customer base calls for

more in-depth evaluation of key policies and processes in order to formulate more meaningful and concrete targets for improvement. In keeping with its customer-centric approach to doing business, IPS intends to expand its outreach efforts to its FOIA clientele. Thus, the targeted improvements will be aimed at on satisfying customer needs. The ISO 9000 quality management standard and other management methodologies will help IPS managers drive needed improvements throughout the FOIA process.

D. Areas Chosen to Include in Improvement Plan

- (1) Customer Service
- (2) Informing the Public on FOIA Process
- (3) Use of Information Technology
- (4) Expedited Processing
- (5) Multi-Track Processing
- (6) Affirmative Disclosure under FOIA Subsection (a)(2)
- (7) Backlog Reduction
- (8) Troubleshooting Existing Problems – Data Integrity and Business Processes

E. Goals and steps/milestones for each area

NAME: **CUSTOMER SERVICE**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 1: *Develop customer service standards*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Develop customer service plan based on *ad hoc* input from customers
- Pilot a new Requester Service Center telephone system (to include hardware and software) to permit managerial intervention, monitoring and control, and institute solutions, as appropriate
- Establish requirement for mandatory customer service training for all staff and supervisors in FOIA Requester Service Center
- Post customer service standards on website

TIME MILESTONES:

By February 2007:

- Develop and post on website customer service plan
- Complete pilot of telephone system

By March 2007:

- Based on results of pilot, institute new telephone system, as appropriate
- Post qualitative and quantitative customer service standards on website
- Complete mandatory customer service training

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Branch chiefs to quarterly review productivity reports against established customer service standards, i.e., response times for status inquiries, acknowledging requests, etc.
- FOIA Public Liaison to review customer feedback received by Requester Service Center about acknowledgement process and responses to status inquiries

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 2: Improve content of and response times for acknowledging requests and answering status inquiries

PLANNED STEPS:

- Conduct in-depth senior-level review of current acknowledgement process
- Conduct in-depth review of current process for responding to status inquiries
- Establish standards for acknowledgement process and formalize them in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Train staff on SOPs
- Monitor progress and implement necessary process improvements
- Continue to improve quality and timeliness of responses through performance management and statistical analysis

TIME MILESTONES:

By December 2006:

- Complete in-depth senior-level review of current acknowledgement process

By April 2007:

- Complete in-depth review of process for responding to status inquiries
- Revise letter templates, as indicated by review

By June 2007:

- Train staff on SOPs, including proper identification of validity requirements
- Create standards for acknowledgement process
- Complete formalization of Standard Operating Procedures for acknowledgment process

Beginning July 2007:

- Branch chiefs quarterly monitor progress

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Branch chiefs to biannually audit random sampling of case files and conduct statistical analysis for adherence to SOPs and standards

NAME: **INFORMING PUBLIC ABOUT FOIA PROCESS**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE: *Find ways to improve website based on customer preferences*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Conduct in-depth evaluation of website and explore methods for measuring customer satisfaction with website
- Establish focus group to better discern requester preferences, including website user-friendliness, ease of navigation, as well as need to improve communication with requester community, and public awareness of website
- Evaluate feedback from focus group and benchmark with industry to establish standards for website
- Establish system to monitor progress toward meeting standards
- Initiate viable solutions and post changes/solutions to website
- Consolidate FOIA Guide information into single document

TIME MILESTONES:

By December 2006:

- Identify and host focus group aimed at improving website based on customer preferences

By April 2007:

- Evaluate focus group feedback/findings

By June 2007:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of website and establishment of standards and benchmarking with industry
- Complete consolidation of FOIA guide information on website
- Complete posting of changes/solutions to website

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Follow-up feedback from focus group members
- Feedback provided by requesters who contact FOIA Requester Service Center
- Quarterly reviews of website contents for accuracy and timeliness conducted by FOIA Requester Service Center

NAME: **USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE: *Examine methods for disclosing information in electronic format according to customer request*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Examine available COTS solutions that will permit and facilitate the posting of declassified documents and “burning” documents to CDs
- Conduct Proof of Concept of an available COTS solution
- If feasible, initiate pilot project of COTS solution
- Work with OMB, DOJ and intelligence community on the use of IT in providing public access to information, and to resolve public access issues, like the ability to provide released records in specific electronic formats

TIME MILESTONES:

By January 2007:

- Complete Proof of Concept of COTS solution

By April 2007:

- Based on results of Proof of Concept for COTS solution, initiate pilot phase

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- COTS solution must be found to provide requested records as specified by requester at highest possible standard within national security/intelligence community

NAME: **EXPEDITED PROCESSING**

GOALS/OBJECTIVES: *Ensure:*

- *consistency in applying expeditious processing criteria;*
- *that requests are granted expedition in accordance with statutory requirement and published regulations (22 C.F.R. §171.12);*
- *that requests determined to warrant expedition are processed ahead of all others, except for requests already determined to warrant expedition*
- *that case tracking database accurately reflects expeditious processing determinations*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Conduct in-depth evaluation of current expedited processing procedures
- Clarify and/or update expedite criteria definitions and procedures in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Train all staff on procedures
- Supervisors to weekly monitor expedited cases

TIME MILESTONES:

By March 2007:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of expedited processing procedures
- Complete update of SOPs
- Complete training of staff and institute improved supervisory oversight

By June 2007:

- Ensure database accurately reflects expeditious processing determinations

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Quarterly audit all case in which expeditious processing was requested for adherence to SOPs and standards and take any corrective action necessary to enhance compliance
- Branch chiefs to weekly monitor the status of request granted expedition

NAME: **MULTI-TRACK PROCESSING**

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: *Ensure:*

- *consistency in applying multi-track processing criteria*
- *multi-track system remains effective*
- *that requests are processed first-in, first-out within each track*
- *that case tracking database accurately reflects expeditious processing determinations*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Conduct in-depth evaluation of current multi-track processing procedures
- Clarify and/or update multi-track definitions and procedures in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Train all staff on procedures
- Branch chiefs to quarterly monitor appropriate implementation of multi-track system

TIME MILESTONES:

By April 2007:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of multi-track process
- Complete update of SOPs
- Complete training of staff and institute improved supervisory oversight

By October 2007:

- Ensure database accurately reflects multi-track processing determinations

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Branch chiefs to perform quarterly audits of random sampling of case files for adherence to SOPs and standards and to identify any trends that may affect the entire population

NAME: **AFFIRMATIVE DISCLOSURE UNDER SUBSECTION (a)(2)**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 1: *Improve overall compliance with FOIA (a)(2) requirements*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Perform initial query of all bureaus about any additional (a)(2) material that is not already posted on website or other public venue
- Evaluate any additional (a)(2) material returned by bureaus
- Post appropriate materials to FOIA website and schedule updates according to bureau schedules
- Annually query the Department for any new sources of (a)(2) material

TIME MILESTONES:

By March 2007:

- Complete evaluation of additional (a)(2) materials sent back by bureaus and post material that is appropriate on the website

By March of 2008 and annually thereafter:

- Complete query of Department for any new sources of (a)(2) material

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Complete evaluation of responses from all bureaus received in IPS
- Post appropriate materials in Electronic Reading Room

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 2: *Post frequently requested documents on website*

PLANNED STEPS:

- Conduct in-depth evaluation of process for posting frequently requested documents on website
- Establish written procedures for identifying frequently requested documents

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- Train staff on procedures
- Implement procedures

TIME MILESTONES:

By May 2007:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of process of posting frequently requested documents on website

By October 2007:

- Complete update of SOPs for staff on identifying frequently requested documents

By January 2008:

- Complete training of staff and fully implement procedures
- Complete update of SOPs for staff on identifying frequently requested documents

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Frequently requested documents on website will be updated quarterly
- Quarterly monitor progress of web postings and compliance with procedures

NAME: **BACKLOG REDUCTION**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 1: Short-term project to achieve 35 percent reduction in projected end-of-FY'06 backlog of FOIA/PA requests made directly to Department (not including referrals from other agencies)

PLANNED STEPS:

- Realign resources from other IPS program areas temporarily and restore WAE reviewer hours to assist with FOIA backlog reduction
- Assign summer hires to work on backlog reduction
- Closely monitor project status to ensure steady progress

TIME MILESTONES:

By October 2006:

- Reduce projected backlog by 35 percent

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Amount projected end-of-FY2006 backlog of requests made directly to the Department (projected at about 3,700 direct requests) is actually reduced

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 2: Evaluate production rates in order to identify what a reasonable backlog of requests is, and then determine the specific resources needed to reduce and maintain the backlog at that level

PLANNED STEPS:

- Undertake study to determine what a reasonable backlog level would be given requests received and resources required
- Identify, develop, validate and utilize a variety of management tools to evaluate performance and productivity
- Evaluate results of operational review performed by decentralized bureaus
- Build awareness in the Department of the requirements of E.O. 13392
- Assess data to identify resources needs (i.e., human resources, including FTE and contractor, equipment, software and infrastructure) to maintain reasonable backlog level over the long-term
- Use data to justify necessary resources to Department resource managers
- Implement solutions identified
- Monitor/report on progress to Department senior officials

TIME MILESTONES:

By September 2006:

- Build awareness within the Department of the requirements of E.O. 13392

By December 2006:

- Complete evaluation of decentralized bureaus operational reviews

By March 2007:

- Determine reasonable backlog level
- Determine necessary FTE and contractor resources
- Determine necessary equipment and software

- Determine necessary space

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Achieving and maintaining reasonable backlog level
- Weekly management reports on pending workload and requests completed

NAME: **TROUBLESHOOTING OTHER PROBLEMS – IMPROVING DATA INTEGRITY AND BUSINESS PROCESSES**

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 1: Establish standards for data integrity for the automated case tracking system and ensure that all employees and supervisors understand and maintain those standards

PLANNED STEPS:

- Assess data integrity in case tracking system and conduct gap analysis
- Establish and implement standards, responsibilities and procedures for entering data
- Train and regularly update training of all staff on proper data entry procedures
- Establish mechanism to monitor data integrity and hold employees and supervisors accountable
- Integrate accountability for data integrity and adherence to SOPs in work requirements

TIME MILESTONES:

By December 2006:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of data integrity
- Establish and implement standards, responsibilities and procedures for entering data
- Complete initial training of all staff

By January 2007:

- Establish work requirements and system for monitoring compliance with data integrity standards

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Periodic audits of random sampling of case files to determine accuracy
- Ongoing review by supervisors and team leaders to conduct error-rate analysis

GOAL/OBJECTIVE 2: Streamline and standardize FOIA business processes, and ensure that all employees and supervisors are trained on processes and their proper implementation

PLANNED STEPS:

- Assess all FOIA business processes
- Seek ISO 9000 certification for all IPS branches
- Identify streamlined processes and establish them as standards
- Incorporate procedures for standardized business processes into SOPs
- Train all employees and supervisors on standardized business processes
- Integrate accountability for adherence to SOPs into work requirements

TIME MILESTONES:

By December 2007:

- Complete in-depth evaluation of FOIA business processes
- Identify streamlined processes that will become standards
- Establish and implement procedures for standardized business processes

By January 2008:

- Complete training of all staff on streamlined, standardized business processes, and establish system for monitoring compliance

Beginning March 2008:

- Branch chiefs to quarterly monitor implementation of streamlined, standardized business processes

After 2008:

- Complete ISO 9000 certification of all branches

MEANS OF MEASUREMENT:

- Biannual audits of a random sampling of case files to determine compliance

F. (1) Areas Anticipated to Be Completed by December 31, 2006

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Complete in in-depth senior-level review of current acknowledgement process

INFORMING PUBLIC ABOUT FOIA PROCESS

- Identify and host focus group aimed at improving website based on customer preferences

BACKLOG REDUCTION

- Reduce projected end-of-FY2006 backlog by 35 percent
- Build awareness within the Department of the requirements of E.O. 13392
- Complete evaluation of decentralized bureaus operational reviews

TROUBLESHOOTING OTHER PROBLEMS – IMPROVING DATA INTEGRITY AND BUSINESS PROCESSES

- Complete in-depth evaluation of data integrity
- Establish and implement standards, responsibilities and procedures for entering data
- Complete initial training of all staff on standards, responsibilities and procedures for entering data

(2) Areas Anticipated to Be Completed by December 31, 2007

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Develop customer service plan based on *ad hoc* input from customers
- Complete pilot of telephone system
- Based on the results of pilot, institute new telephone system, as appropriate (includes hardware and software)
- Post qualitative and quantitative customer service standards on website
- Complete mandatory customer service training
- Complete in-depth review of process for responding to status inquiries
- Revise letter templates, as indicated by review
- Train staff on SOPs, including proper identification of validity requirements
- Create standards for acknowledgement process

(UNCLASSIFIED)

- Complete formalization of Standard Operating Procedures for acknowledgment process
- Branch chiefs quarterly monitor progress

INFORMING PUBLIC ABOUT FOIA PROCESS

- Evaluate focus group findings/feedback for improving website
- Complete in-depth evaluation of website and establishment of standards
- Complete consolidation of FOIA guide information on website
- Complete posting of changes/solutions to website

USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

- Complete Proof of Concept of COTS solution
- Based on results of Proof of Concept for COTS solution, initiate pilot phase

EXPEDITED PROCESSING

- Complete in-depth evaluation of expedited processing procedures
- Complete update of SOPs
- Complete training of staff and institute improved supervisory oversight
- Ensure database accurately reflects expeditious processing determinations

MULTI-TRACK PROCESSING

- Complete in-depth evaluation of multi-track processing procedures
- Complete update of SOPs
- Complete training of staff and institute improved supervisory oversight
- Ensure database accurately reflects multi-track processing determinations

AFFIRMATIVE DISCLOSURE UNDER SUBSECTION (a)(2)

- Complete evaluation of additional (a)(2) materials sent back by bureaus and post material that is appropriate on the website
- Complete in-depth evaluation of process of posting frequently requested documents on website
- Complete update of SOPs for staff on identifying frequently requested documents

BACKLOG REDUCTION

- Determine reasonable backlog level
- Determine necessary FTE and contractor resources
- Determine necessary equipment and software

- Determine necessary space

TROUBLESHOOTING OTHER PROBLEMS – IMPROVING DATA INTEGRITY AND BUSINESS PROCESSES

- Establish work requirements and system for monitoring compliance with data integrity standards
- Complete in-depth evaluation of FOIA business processes
- Identify streamlined processes that will become standards
- Establish and implement written procedures for standardized business processes

(3) Areas Anticipated to Be Completed After December 31, 2007

AFFIRMATIVE DISCLOSURE UNDER SUBSECTION (a)(2)

- Complete training of staff and fully implement procedures
- Complete update of SOPs for staff on identifying frequently requested documents for committee review
- Query all bureaus for any updates of (a)(2) materials

TROUBLESHOOTING OTHER PROBLEMS – IMPROVING DATA INTEGRITY AND BUSINESS PROCESSES

- Complete training of all staff on streamlined, standardized business processes, and establish system for monitoring compliance
- Branch chiefs to quarterly monitor implementation of streamlined, standardized business processes
- Complete ISO 9000 certification for all IPS branches